

Laus, Lues, and Louis: Jacobus Plutacrius' Morbi Gallici...Laus

Around Saturnalia, likely in 1682, one pseudonymous Jacobus Plutacrius published, *sine loco et sine nomine* and with a coded date, an oration in praise of syphilis, the *Morbi Gallici, sive Luis Venereae, aut potius Anonymae laus*, “A Praise of the French Disease, or the Venereal Disease, or rather of Anonymous.” In the guise of praising Syphilis, or *Lues*, however, the author, likely deftly skewers Louis XIV of France. Aside from a brief entry in Astruc’s 1740 annotated bibliography *De morbis Venereis libri novem* and bibliographies derived of it, the *Morbi Gallici...laus* has never been studied.

I situate the *Morbi Gallici...laus* at the intersection of two major strands of Neo-Latin literature. On the one hand, it belongs to the northern European tradition of *encomia paradoxa* or speeches in praise of unworthy topics, erudite works with heavy allusion to classical literature, much in the vein of Gorgias’ *Encomium in Helenam*, Erasmus’ *Moriae Encomium*, Putanius’ *Ovi Encomium*, and especially the host of praises of gout beginning with Pirckheimer’s *Podagrae Laus*, itself a confluence of the tradition of the *encomium paradoxon* and Lucian’s tragedy *Podagra*. Within this tradition one may also find politically pointed satire like the pseudonymous *Corona Regia* written against the English King James. The tradition of the *encomium paradoxon*, studied on its own by Pease (1926) and Miller (1956) and Tomarken (1990), is now included on the broader rubric of Menippean or Saturnalian literature, as by Blanchard (1995) and De Smet (1996), a classification confirmed by the Saturnalian dating of the *Laus*. On the other hand, the *Morbi Gallici...laus* makes open allusion to the large body of Neo-Latin writing about syphilis, including not only medical texts but also Fracastoro’s epic *Syphilis, sive Morbus Gallicus* (1530). I also examine the *Morbi Gallici...laus* in its historical context, especially the War of the Reunions, to show that the text has heavy political overtones. Further, I demonstrate

how particular readings of classical texts included in the *Laus* and allusions to classical myth create further connections between Louis and *Lues*.

Bibliography

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